

SPORTS



Who is...
Savanah Olson, Bronco girls senior shot putter, is featured

B2

QUICK HITS

Chandler hurls no-hitter, 14 strikeouts

The Rainy River Community College softball team's first win of the season came in a big way Thursday when the Voyageurs won their first of three games on the day at the Rosemount Irish Dome by shutting out Minnesota West, 14-0, in five innings.

RRCC pitcher Deven Chandler, a freshman from Moscow, Idaho, recorded the victory after throwing a no-hitter and striking out 14. The other out came on a ground ball back to the pitcher, while the five Minnesota West batters who reached base were all walked.

"That performance by Chandler was off the charts," said Voyageurs head coach Dieter Humbert, who noted that was first softball game of any length in which he knows of an RRCC pitcher recording 14 strikeouts.

At the plate, the Voyageurs tallied 18 hits.

Chandler was one of RRCC four batters to record three hits. DyAna Imhof added three hits with a pair of doubles and 4 RBI. Jaimie Shaw also picked up two doubles among her three hits and drove in two runs. Brooke Millerbernd had three singles with 2 RBI.

Three more Voyageurs had two hits apiece. Karen Sondergard recorded two doubles and 2 RBI. Sierra Ramirez singled and doubled with 3 RBI. Megan Johnson also singled and doubled with 2RBI.

RRCC 12, CLC 4

The Voyageurs also won their second game Thursday when they defeated Central Lakes College, 12-4, in six innings.

Ramirez picked up the pitching victory throwing all six innings, allowing the four runs, one earned, on three hits with three walks while striking out five.

Of RRCC's nine hits, Brooke Millerbernd had three singles with 3 RBI. Imhof recorded a three-run homer. Shaw had two singles and 2 RBI. Sondergard doubled and drove in a run. Chandler added two singles.

RC 10, RRCC 1

The Voyageurs then lost 10-1 in five innings in their third and final game Thursday against Ridgewater College, a team ranked 10th nationally in the NJCAA Division III preseason top 10.

"We kind of ran out of gas (in the third game) a little bit," Humbert said.

Chandler started pitching for RRCC, but didn't get out of the first inning when she faced five batters, walked three of them and gave up three runs on a base-clearing double before allowing a two-run homer.

Ramirez then pitched five innings, giving up five more runs, three earned, on nine hits with two walks while striking out two.

The Voyageurs tallied six hits. Millerbernd recorded a single and drove in the only run. Johnson and Sondergard both doubled. Shaw, Chandler and Ramirez each singled.

GIRLS TRACK AND FIELD PREVIEW

Broncos seek more success in 2015

FHS returns five state qualifiers

BY KEVIN BONESKE
Sports Editor

After winning multiple meets last season – including the Iron Range Conference, Section 8A True Team, North Subsection 7A and Section 7A championships – the International Falls girls track and field team has a tough act to follow in 2015 with not all of the key players back from a year ago.

The Broncos, who also had seven girls qualify individually last year for the State Class A Meet with five of them earning medals, enter the 2015 season, which begins next Tuesday with the Paul Bunyan Indoor Invitational at Bemidji State University, without the top sprinter and hurdler from a year ago.

Jen Erickson enters her 17th year as Falls' head coach with the key graduation losses from season including Breanna Shofner, a four-time state qualifier in the 100- and 200-meter dashes.

Shofner, who was also part of the Broncos' state-qualifying 4X100 relay team, closed out her high school career with a fifth-place finish at state in the 200 dash.

Another state medalist who graduated, Hailey Fentem, is a three-time state qualifier in the 100 hurdles, for which she holds the school record and placed eighth at state last year.

Fentem and Shofner continue to compete in track and field at the collegiate level with both on the College of St. Scholastica women's team.

Two other graduation losses for the Broncos include Amy Auran, who qualified for state last year in the pole vault, and Lexi Owen, a three-time state participant who was part of the 4X100 relay.

"(Shofner, Fentem, Auran and Owen) pulled in a lot of points for the team and were a very versatile

group who could compete in a variety of events," Erickson said.

The Falls returns five athletes with state meet experience, including a pair of shot putters.

Senior Savanah Olson, a state qualifier in the throwing events the past four years, placed seventh at state last year in the shot put. Freshman Emma Gilbert, who placed eighth at state in the shot put, was also part of last year's state-qualifying 4X100 relay.

Three returning sophomores with state experience from last year include Lexi Erickson, who placed eighth at state in the 3200 run, Claire Herzig, who qualified for state in the pole vault, and Valandre Butler, who was part of the state-qualifying 4X100 relay.

The strengths of this year's team, Jen Erickson said, include senior leadership with Olson and middle distance runner Tayler Hebner as captains, versatile athletes who "can compete in any combination of events on the track and in the field," field events playing "a key part in our team's success at meets," as well as competitiveness, talent and potential.

"Several returning athletes have earned all-conference honors and competed at the state meet," she said. "We have a large younger group of girls who are still trying to decide which events they will succeed in."

Jen Erickson said the team's weaknesses this year include a "lack of depth in the longer distance races and key losses from seniors in the hurdles and sprints, but there are several girls ready to step and fill those holes."

Along with advancing as many athletes as possible to the state meet, she said the team goals this year also include seeking to "work hard and improve individual performances as the season



FILE PHOTO

In front, the Broncos' Valandre Butler receives the baton from Claire Herzig while competing in the 4X200-meter relay in last year's Section 7A Meet at UMD. Butler qualified for state last year in the 4X100 relay, while Herzig was a state qualifier in the pole vault. Both return in 2015.

progresses and stay focused on our long-term goals for the team which would be to defend the titles earned last year and to do well at True Team Sections.

"We also have to stay healthy and be ready to compete in a variety of weather conditions the spring sports always have to deal with."

Jen Erickson said she is

concerned the most this season about "keeping the girls healthy and injury free."

"We can't afford to have anyone injured or sick, especially when we get into mid-May with True Team and IRC (meets) and then the following weeks when our focus turns to Subsections and Sections," she said.

The teams to watch out for this season, Jen Erick-

son said, include Grand Rapids and Mesabi East in the IRC and Esko and Mesabi East in Section 7A.

"Mesabi East will also be a close contender for the Subsection title," she said.

Following indoor meets at BSU on March 24 and 31, the Broncos' first home and outdoor meet, weather permitting, will be the Bronco Booster Invite on April 9.

BOYS TRACK AND FIELD PREVIEW

Broncos seek improvement to be competitive

Depth a concern

BY KEVIN BONESKE
Sports Editor

The International Falls boys track and field team hasn't qualified anyone for state the past three seasons, but will be looking to do so in 2015.

The Broncos, who begin this season next Tuesday in the Paul Bunyan Indoor Invitational at Bemidji State University, have the majority of their top athletes back from last year, including junior Ethan Phung.

Phung came the closest to qualifying for state in 2014 with his third-place finish at the Section 7A Meet in the high jump when he cleared 5 feet, 10 inches, 2 inches below the runner-up who qualified.

Longtime Falls boys track and field head coach Paul Hjelle returns for another season with his key graduation loss from last year including captains Jakob Ettestad and Paul Skoglund.

"Jakob was strong in the sprinting events and was really good in our 4X100 and 4X200 relays," Hjelle said. "Paul was our top 110-meter hurdler. He scored points in most of the meets in this event and also ran in our



FILE PHOTO

The Broncos' Ethan Phung, shown competing in the high jump at the 2014 North Subsection 7A Meet in Hibbing, is among the top returning athletes this season on Falls' boys track and field team.

sprint relays at times."

In addition to Phung, who had a part in scoring 17 of the Broncos' 26 points in last year's Section 7A Meet by also placing fifth in the triple jump (40-0.5), sixth in the long jump (19-2.5) and joining the 4X100 relay that finished fifth in 46.73 seconds, Hjelle's list of top returning athletes also includes:

■ Senior Austin Ruport,

who came close to qualifying for state his sophomore season in the discus, but then was injured last year. Hjelle said he expects Ruport to be "a top discus and shot put thrower this year."

■ Senior Gary Harala, for whom Hjelle said "has the potential to really do well in the discus this year" and "also to score in the shot put."

■ Senior Nehemiah Ol-

son, who placed in the 100 dash at last year's Section 7A Meet and also competes in the 4X100 and 4X200 relays and shot put. "Nehemiah should have a great senior year," Hjelle said.

■ Senior Cole Tatsak, a section qualifier in the 300 hurdles for whom Hjelle said "has good speed and should really help us in our relays."

■ Junior Wyatt Helgeson, another section qualifier last year in the high jump for whom Hjelle said "is right there with Ethan."

"We will score points with Wyatt and Ethan in these field events," Hjelle said.

The strengths on this year's team, Hjelle said, is having "a good group of individuals coming back with talent" that also includes sophomore Nick Hedtke.

"(Hedtke) is really going to be good," Hjelle said. "He's fast and powerful and he will help us not only in the sprints/relays, but could also help us in the shot put."

"Our distance events will be in good hands with John Cowman and Jared Hunter returning. Both of these two are talented and should score quality points for us. Chase Howdahl should help

us also (in the distance events) if we can get him healthy."

Hjelle said he is concerned the most this year about the team's lack of depth.

"We are going to rely heavily on the (top returning athletes) for points this year," he said. "Some of our younger athletes may have to compete at the varsity level at some meets which can be difficult."

This year's team goals, Hjelle said, include wanting "to be a team that works hard in practices and that shows improvement at our meets."

"We want to be competitive at meets," he said. "We would like to finish in the top three at most of our meets."

Hjelle said he is looking forward this season to "being around a great group of upperclassmen."

"We have some quality kids who are not only good athletes, but great young men, too," he said. "We are anxious to see them compete. They could surprise some teams this year."

Following indoor meets at BSU March 24 and 31, the Broncos' first home and outdoor meet, weather permitting, is the Bronco Booster Invite on April 9.

SPORTS SCHEDULE

Today's games

Men's baseball

RRCC at Dakota Wesleyan JV (DH), 1 p.m.

Sunday's games

Men's baseball

RRCC at Dakota Wesleyan JV (DH), 11 a.m.

Tuesday's games

Track and Field

I. Falls in Paul Bunyan Indoor Invite at BSU, 1 p.m.